

UNION OF ASSOCIATIONS
FOR THE BLIND

Paper-

"The Present Position of the Blind as
compared with 1918,"

By

E.D. MACGREGOR
(Ministry of Health)

HV1941 HV1941
M33
1922



**M.C. MIGEL LIBRARY
AMERICAN PRINTING
HOUSE FOR THE BLIND**

GIFT OF
Ben Purse

Photomount
Pamphlet
Binder
Gaylord Bros.
Makers
Syracuse, N. Y.
PAT. JAN 21, 1908

13. 1/2
C.1
October, 1922.

UNION OF ASSOCIATIONS FOR THE BLIND.

MEETINGS of the UNION OF ASSOCIATIONS FOR
THE BLIND, held at Clothworkers' Hall, Mincing Lane,
London, E.C., on Thursday and Friday, the 12th and 13th
October, 1922.

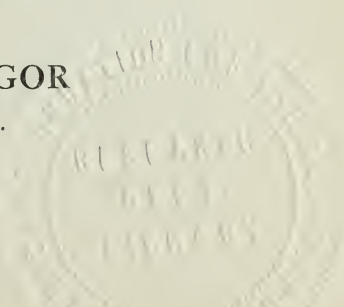
PAPER :—

“The Present Position of the Blind as
compared with 1918,”

BY

E. D. MACGREGOR

(Ministry of Health).



HV 1941

m

cop. 1



THE PRESENT POSITION OF THE BLIND AS COMPARED WITH 1918.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

You have asked me to open this meeting with a paper. I hope I may justify your faith in some degree without abusing your patience. I have been left to choose my own subject-matter, and I propose to review the present position of blind affairs as compared with 1918, before grants were paid or the Blind Persons Act was passed. For convenience, I propose to take grant service by grant service, and hope to show you what developments have taken place in these last few years. I will have some comments to make on various points and I hope to indicate some of the problems that lie before us.

Mr. Macgregor's
Paper.

Let me commence with these bodies which you represent here to-day,—the Counties' Associations. The purpose of the Unions as they were then called was to organise assistance for the blind, to see that their areas were so covered that a blind person's needs could be readily ascertained and met. That purpose was never achieved, it is not achieved to-day, and the work of the Associations will not be finished until it is achieved. Your organisation was incomplete, very incomplete in many areas, your membership was indifferent, and your meetings lacked life. It could hardly be otherwise, the war was claiming so much of all our interests. You had practically no funds, and the difficulties were very great. A great change is noticeable to-day. The grants from the Ministry, amounting to almost £7,000, have enabled registration to be completed. Registration by itself is of little importance, but along with registration, and as a means of securing it, has developed a very complete system of correspondents. There has been a very great creation of new interests, fresh agencies have been called into being, and

large areas hitherto unexplored have been opened up. In the Eastern area a dormant Association has wakened up and where in 1918 there was only one employing agency, no home-teachers, no home-workers, there are now employing agencies at Norwich, Bedford, Cambridge, Luton, Ipswich, and Lincoln. There are some 14 home-teachers and over 60 home-workers. I am not wrong when I attribute a very large share of that development to a reorganised and re-vitalised Counties' Association. In the Metropolitan area we have as fine a Case Committee as sits anywhere in the country, and, owing to the grants from the Ministry, and, I may add, to the great generosity of the Clothworkers' Company and others, cases can be promptly dealt with. I have seen a deal of the work which they have done for the London County Council and other authorities. Training has been arranged for, employment found, pensions obtained, home accommodation secured, out-relief increased, and grants made. These features are common to all the Associations, but I would like to mention the very complete County organisation which has grown up within these last few years in the Midlands and in the West, while in the North a very catholic activity has been shown in all branches of blind work, Local Authorities have been visited and revisited and very substantial grants have been made towards new equipment and other provision.

In the future you will continue to act as chief registration agents under the Local Authorities, as clearing houses for individual cases and centres of influence for your areas. You will have to prompt developments, urge Local Authorities on, and each Association will no doubt progress along its own best lines. The Metropolitan Association, for example, may well become the chief centre of all welfare work in London. Your work is by no means done, and the Ministry is satisfied that invaluable work is being done, work that no other body could perform, and is grateful indeed for the very whole-hearted service which so many of you have given in the past.

I pass now to workshops, and the problems that face us there. During the financial year ended 31st March last grants were paid to workshops amounting to almost £32,000, and practically all of that money has reached the blind in a direct manner in the form of increased remuneration. Inspection has resulted in several cases in better sanitary and improved working conditions. Management has been tightened up and the attention of Committees drawn to numerous matters of concern to the blind employees.

Mr. Macgregor's
Paper.

I referred above to the increased remuneration obtained by the employees, and I wish to say something on the vexed question of augmentation. You are aware that the Ministry have recommended a sliding scale of augmentation. Various systems have been in operation, flat rate, percentage on earnings, minimum wages, as well as sliding scales. These other systems we felt did not take sufficient or fair account of the varying degrees of incapacity in blind workers, degrees which arise from the blindness itself, its extent, its cause, its time of incidence in life, etc. A sliding scale equalises these incapacities so far as possible, and lets each blind person then stand upon his own legs as a human being.

With regard to the actual amounts of the sliding scale let me say that workshop employees are in a minority, but they form the most vocal section of the blind, and the principle of "to him that hath shall be given" has been in many cases carried to excess to the detriment of the unemployable blind living in their own homes. A balance of advantages has to be kept, and that is going to be a difficult and somewhat invidious task.

A further problem is that relating to costs of production. With depression in trade, and foreign competition, it is costing a considerable sum in many workshops to continue to keep blind persons employed at all. I am not exaggerating when I say that, including augmentation, it is costing some workshops from £78 to £100 per annum for each

employee. This matter merits the closest and most urgent consideration, and every avenue must be explored with a view to reducing the costs of production. When a workshop has to find £2 a week for each employee it is obviously a serious matter for it to take on additional workers. There is no need to despair of the future, however. A loss, of course, must be incurred, and we have to work through a period of adjustment following on the abnormal and artificial conditions which obtained during the war.

Cognate to this problem is that of the disposal of goods made by the blind. Selling goods at less than cost price may be commercially necessary at times, but is ruinous as a settled policy. And it is noticeable that it is the larger workshops which suffer most in this direction, the smaller workshops as a rule find a ready local market. I don't wish to draw any hasty conclusions from this because there are various qualifying considerations, but it seems clear that new markets must be sought. The Local Authorities can help considerably, and the London County Council has recently given us an example of this. Country markets are largely untouched, I imagine, and by that I mean the markets in country towns. It is suggested in some quarters that the stimulation of home work has adversely affected the workshops by increasing the volume of finished articles or by diverting orders. If this is true, it is not an argument against the development of home workers' schemes so much as a criticism of the management of the workshops in question. If the quality of articles is good, markets must be found; the volume of these articles must always of necessity be inconsiderable in the total volume produced in the country.

These two problems of cost of production and the disposal of finished goods are receiving attention, and we at the Ministry would be grateful for any considered suggestions or advice that anyone has to offer.

Allied to this question is that of the proper co-operation between the training and the employing agency. I heard the Secretary of the Northern Association say the other day, in that sub-acid manner which we know so well, that she had never met a workshop manager who hadn't always to retrain new employees. Nor have I. Perhaps workshop managers are not always quite sympathetic enough to newcomers who feel strange to new surroundings and new conditions, but it is nevertheless true that there is too little real contact between the last year of training and the first years of employment. Keen and intelligent and constant care and foresight are needed in the selection of trades and occupations for blind trainees. It is not a very wise thing to train two blind men who are to return to the same country village in piano tuning, or to turn out an excellent maker of reversible mats to find a living in a village where potato-pots would find a good market. Piano tuning and typing, for example, may be good things for the blind to learn, but some regard must be had to the future possibilities of employment. The remedy for all these things lies, as in most other things in this world, not in the prescription of a system of regulations by a Government Department, but in the personal interest of the man on the spot in the efficient carrying on of his job. The blind are very limited in their opportunity and their adaptability, and a good deal of hard, clear thinking has to be done if round pegs are to be fitted into round holes.

Mr. Macgregor's
Paper.

The next service which I wish to touch upon is that of home-workers.' In 1918 there were no organised home-workers at all. To-day there are some 700 to 800 included in schemes and the numbers are being added to daily. Last year grants paid for this service amounted to over £6,000, this year that sum will shew a marked increase. In Plymouth, Exeter, Bristol, Birmingham, Nottingham, the Home Counties north of the Thames, and the Home Counties south of the Thames, there are whole-time supervisors with

assistants constantly traversing large areas visiting home-workers, assisting them in their work, providing materials, obtaining orders, and marketing their goods. In many other places this work is carried on by the home-teachers.

This service, I claim, has proved its value completely. I appreciate its difficulties, the half-trained capacities of many of the workers, the finding of work of a regular kind, and the disposal of the goods made, but even in face of these difficulties the help that has been given has enabled the home-workers to double and, in some cases, treble their previous earnings. Experience also is shewing us the way out of many of the difficulties, or at least a partial way out, and I hope that very soon the Ministry may be able to suggest certain lines of development which may be helpful to the agencies in their work. The value of the service has, as I said, been undoubtedly proved, and it is a source of some wonder to me that in the north, where vigorous initiative is not generally lacking, so little has been done in this way. I know that the industrial north is well served with workshops, but if considerable numbers of home-workers can be found in the counties of Kent, Essex, Gloucester, Worcester, etc., I would imagine that they can be found also in Northumberland, in Durham, in Cumberland and Westmorland, and in the Yorkshire Dales. Curiously enough, the Northern Association have issued an admirable pamphlet on home-workers, and I suggest to them that they devote some consideration to the actual working up of schemes for these larger areas where workshop provision is impossible.

I don't want to touch to-day on the vexed question of the wisdom or unwisdom of the Ministry in fixing the 8s. and 16s. earning capacity limits. We believe in the wisdom of these limits and in the endeavour to keep this service on a real industrial plane. But I want to mention just as an example the case—and it is not an infrequent case—when the worker of 50 or over could earn over 10s. a week if he wished, but won't because he would lose correspondingly on

his old age pension. I am not going to lay down the moralities of such a situation, but here again is an opportunity for the personal touch of the man on the spot. The whole field of home-workers is rich, I imagine, in the adventures of human sympathy in its most practical form, and well worth cultivating for the very joy of the thing.

Mr. Macgregor's
Paper.

The questions of how best to give augmentation to home-workers, methods of marketing goods, the price to be paid for finished articles, etc., will all, I hope, be dealt with very soon in the circular announcement which I referred to above, and suggestions on these matters we will always welcome. One thing I may add. I am a little surprised at the small advantage taken in certain areas of the grant available towards the cost of the initial equipment of home-workers.

If I were asked to say what were the most fruitful developments arising out of State-aid to the blind in the last few years, I would be very inclined to say pensions at 50 and home-teaching. I shall have something to say later about pensions; I want to speak now of home-teaching. I notice that Mr. Siddall is to speak later on this question, and I know of no one better qualified to do so. I hope he will take up anything which I may say with which he disagrees, and retort on me as strongly as he can. Let me say first of all that in 1918 there were about 100 known home-teachers; to-day there are well over 200, and more are needed, representing over £15,000 in grant per annum. This development was no doubt made possible by the grants, but it started and acquired pace as it went on by the needs of the situation itself and, side by side with this development in numbers, there has been an almost complete change in the character of the work done and in the spirit which guides it. And the results have been astonishing. A good home-teaching service is one of the best investments on behalf of the blind which an agency could make. To-day it is no longer a question of teaching the blind to read

Mr. Macgregor's
Paper.

the scriptures in Braille in their own homes; it is a question to-day, if I may put it so, of bringing the blind out of their homes into the world of men and things outside, of giving them an interest and stimulating their interest in what is going on around them. To do that one has to help them in their household needs, in the many small things that are or may be burdensome to a blind person and are irritating and distracting to them. Pecuniary needs have to be met, their blind requirements provided for, interest taken in their interests, sympathy shewn in their troubles. It is work of a high social kind, and it demands fine qualities, tireless patience, kindly tact, infinite sympathy and understanding, as well as knowledge of the ways to practical help. Guardians may have to be interviewed, capacities for industry tested, dishes even may have to be washed, or a cup of tea to be made, and with it all a fine gift for gossip. A little shopping may have to be done and a pair of curtains hemmed (or whatever you do with them) and the curtains hung.

A home-teacher must not be a mere almoner, however, or a discussor of grievances. Her visits should be those of a friend, a friend whose sole and ultimate object is to help the blind person to a fuller interest in life. Don't spoil the blind for their blindness' sake. Help them to live, blind indeed and commanding our instant aid, help them to live as blind citizens of a common world.

Home-teachers who can do all this are few, but that, I suggest, is the end to seek. Home-teachers should not be found too easily, or recruited for the purpose of finding a job for a woman or a man. The man or woman has to be found for the work, and, as is apparent from the very needs to be met and as experience is shewing us, it is difficult for the ordinary blind man or woman to do the work well. There are not many Siddalls and Isherwoods. It is not pleasant to say this, but I think the blind must come to realise that quite apart from the additional expenditure involved the

totally blind home-teacher as a rule cannot possibly, with all the best will in the world, be as helpful to them as a seeing teacher. I do not suggest that there is no room for the blind home-teacher; there is, undoubtedly, but only in conjunction with seeing colleagues in an urban area where a suitable allocation of cases can be arranged for. I know the difficulties well in this matter and the opposition that comes from the officials of the National League. We regret that opposition for the sake of the blind themselves, and I trust the blind will come to believe that we are not their enemies in this matter, but their friends. I won't dilate on this further; I hope Mr. Siddall and others will give us the benefit of their views and experience.

Mr. Macgregor's
Paper.

We are anxious to see home-teachers reasonably remunerated and with a definite status in work for the blind. We feel that a home-teacher should have not less than £150 a year plus expenses, and we hope, with the help of the College of Teachers of the Blind, to institute an examination which all home-teachers appointed after a date to be fixed will be required to sit for within two years of the commencement of their appointments. We look to see a progressive improvement in the quality of the teachers as well as an increase in their numbers, and in due course to have a body of teachers as well fitted and equipped for their work as any like body in the country. The recruitment to the service will require to be carefully watched, the work itself encouraged, and the teachers supported. I notice from the agenda that you are to discuss the desirability of holding periodically meetings of home-teachers, at which they can exchange views and notes. I hope that such conferences will be held, and it is a mark of the new spirit abroad in the matter that the question should be broached at all. It is to be remembered that it is through the home-teachers that the great bulk of the blind are to be reached and helped. There are many more blind living at home than are to be found in the workshops or the schools, and the

claims of these people have more and more to be considered and a new orientation found which will enable us to deal fairly by both classes.

I do not propose to detain you over the service of Homes and Hostels or Book-production, nor of the work that is being done by the National Library for the Blind. New hostels have been opened and new home accommodation provided. As regards the Library, I see that the question of subscriptions to its work is to be discussed, and in case I am not able to be present when that matter is mentioned I wish to remove the impression that appears to be held in some quarters that the Ministry will not approve subscriptions. This is far from being the case. The Inspectors have urged the claims of the Library everywhere, and in one case only have we suggested that in view of the needs of the rest of the blind the proposed subscription was disproportionate having regard to the total estimated expenditure. We are as anxious at the Ministry as anyone to see the work of the Library safeguarded and developed, but I suggest that the best way to achieve that end is not by pressing somewhat extravagant claims. It is right, however, that Local Authorities should make suitable subscriptions and that agencies acting as full agents for Local Authorities should increase their subscriptions to the Library.

The total amount of grant in aid paid during the last financial year amounted to £70,000. This year it will reach £80,000. Accompanying these grants there has been inspection, some requirements to be complied with, and some conditions to be observed. These requirements and conditions have not been onerous, I think, nor, I hope, irritating. The inspection, I feel sure, has been wholly helpful and useful. The good relations which we maintain with all agencies are due to the work of the Inspectors, whose visits have not been mere duties, but have been made rather as friends more anxious to help than criticise, and when criticism has

been necessary it has always been friendly criticism. I hope and believe that you all agree with that, and that you will regard the Ministry as anxious to help you in every way open to it. We have had three years in which to get to know each other, and I think the result has been good. The aim we both have is the same, to help *all* the blind, each class without detriment to the other. And one great result of the grant in aid has been the bringing forward of the claims of the outside blind into fuller prominence. These folk as a rule belong to no League or other organisation, they are not vocal as to their needs, you have to go and find them and help them. Grants have enabled agencies to rectify the balance somewhat, and the Blind Persons Act has further rectified the balance in the same direction. I pass now to the consideration of that Act, but before doing so let me emphasise very strongly that grants, while earned on specific services, are not necessarily meant to be utilised on these services—they are meant for the general welfare of the blind. The workshop grant is not necessarily to be devoted to increase an already sufficient augmentation.

Mr. Macgregor's
Paper.

Why and how the Blind Persons Act was passed I hope to say something about later. For the moment I wish to say something about its working. Section I is the Pension Section. On the 30th June last there were 9,333 blind persons between the ages of 50 and 70 in receipt of the old age pension, and at £25 per annum each that number represents an Exchequer payment of over £233,000 per annum. The voluntary agencies have done well in the administration of this Section. As you all know, certificates of blindness made by an approved voluntary agency have been accepted as evidence of blindness, and no other evidence has been so accepted. In all cases where such certificates were not forthcoming Pension Officers were required to appeal to the Minister against the allowances of pension. Over 3,300 such appeals have been made, and the vast majority of such appeals affected persons who were unknown to any voluntary

agency. I mention this to shew that registration was by no means complete at the date of the passing of the Act, and I may add that the largest estimate which was formed of the probable number of recipients of pensions never exceeded 8,000, and I fear that to-day the further information we now have in this and in other directions make me believe that the total probable blind population in England and Wales is round about 45,000, whereas only 35,000 have been registered.

Under Section I we may now expect only the ordinary yearly accretions to the number of applicants, and the question is being considered of withdrawing the certifying power of the voluntary agencies and allowing all cases to come to the Ministry for decision on appeal, but the initial work of coping with the first rush of applicants would not have been so smoothly done without the very loyal co-operation of all agencies.

There was always a temptation that Boards of Guardians would take full advantage of the old age pensions in the matter of out-relief, but I am satisfied that very few Boards, if any, have not been as considerate as possible in reassessing relief where the pension was obtained. An incalculable boon has been conferred on many blind folk who have won the satisfaction of knowing that they are no longer merely a burden, but are contributing something at least to their own support.

Before I pass to Section 2 of the Act let me say a few words about Section 3. That Section was designed to safeguard the public against bogus and similar agencies. It has had the desired effect of causing several notorious agencies to close down and incidentally in doing so it has caused a great deal of work to your Chairman, who has very willingly undertaken, at the request of the Charity Commissioners, to distribute the sums of money which were impounded by the Commissioners.

I come now to Section 2, the Section which requires County and County Borough Councils to make satisfactory arrangements for promoting the welfare of blind persons. There are 145 such Local Authorities in the country and schemes have now been approved in all but 18 cases, and of these latter we have good assurance of receiving schemes from at least 10. The remainder, the delinquents, I shall have something to say about later. It is two years since the Act was passed and schemes have been long in coming, you may say. I am not dissatisfied. Economy has assailed us at every turn, and even in more prosperous times it has taken quite as long, if not longer, to get schemes for infant welfare and other social services going. We have been interested only in the blind; Local Authorities have many other interests to claim their attention. Assuredly the sympathy has been there, and is there, but the sympathy has had to be instructed, and that takes time. There is no reason at all for discouragement. Let me mention a few estimates of expenditure that will be incurred this present year by Local Authorities:—Bristol £3,200, Devon £1,000, Bradford £4,250, Birmingham £4,200, Barrow £1,750, Dewsbury £300, Halifax £600, West Riding £3,000, Wigan £750, Burnley £650, Lancashire £4,800, Kent £1,000, and so on. These are some of the larger authorities; the smaller have done as well in proportion, as, for instance, Flint £150, Bedford £350, Cambridge £250, Hunts £200, Lincoln (Holland) £200, East Sussex £275, Derby £370, Gloucester £300, Worcestershire £400, and so on. These are only examples.

Mr. Macgregor's
Paper.

These are not unsatisfactory figures, and they are only a commencement. In all there is every likelihood of voluntary agencies receiving between £50,000 and £60,000 this year from Local Authorities.

All the schemes submitted have a strong family resemblance; they undertake to visit children under 5 and to provide other accommodation where the homes are unsatisfac-

tory, to continue elementary and technical education, to provide training for all capable of profiting thereby, to provide workshop and other forms of employment, together with augmentation of wages, to promote home-teaching and other social services, to provide hostel and home accommodation wherever necessary. A feature of some schemes is the constitution of a joint committee of representatives of the Local Authority, the Local Education Authority, the Guardians, and the voluntary agencies, to act as a clearing-house committee for all cases as they arise. Nor are these all merely paper schemes, as it alleged in some quarters. Definite agreements, for instance, have been entered into by the Birmingham Institution with 12 out of the 14 authorities with which it deals. The six northern counties of Wales have agreed terms with the North Wales Home-Teaching Society, and similarly agreements, formal or informal, are almost weekly being made all over the country.

About these agreements I would like to say this, that it is good policy to agree with a Local Authority reasonably and quickly. Estimates have been framed and they must meantime be accepted. Things are in an experimental stage, and it is much more to the point to accept those estimates for the first year and make your case out for more for next year than to expostulate over loudly on the inadequacy of the moneys provided. It is new money, make the best use of it in extending your work, justify your expenditure, and state your further needs. It fills me with astonishment, I confess, to hear of an agency offering to return money because it is not enough. The Local Authorities have to be prompted, have to be interested and taught—they are not to be cajoled or bullied. It all takes time, but I am disposed to believe that the foundations are being well laid.

I spoke of “new” money coming from the Local Authorities, and I think I am right in calling it such. Voluntary subscriptions will not appreciably decline because of the

passing of the Blind Persons Act, else your own past experience and the experience of others in other branches of charitable effort will be belied. The appeal of the blind is enormous, irresistible as is the appeal of children, and since Local Authorities have taken part in the Child Welfare movement voluntary efforts have multiplied exceedingly. Good work will always attract help to it, work that is without suspicion of self-seeking, is keen and loyal to its own end. I think you need have no fear that any large decline in voluntary subscriptions will follow as a result of the Act and of State assistance generally. I have seen and had reported no smallest sign of that. There is one appeal I want to make here, however. I am not going to suggest centralisation of collections or any other such remote possibility, but something much more easily attainable. There are some Institutions—I am not referring to the National Institute—with very considerable capital accounts which are being added to from year to year, and which have no immediately apparent large capital purposes in view. They have poorer neighbours who spend from year to year what they get and can't get enough. I suggest that there is something mean, something spiritless, a want of trust and belief in the future, when capital moneys are hoarded for an unknown posterity. My sympathies are with the smaller fellow struggling along, making ends very hardly meet, but gaily adventurous all the time, not so much with the big fellow with a comfortable banking account and very little care for the morrow. I wish he would help the smaller fellow and not ask too many questions in the doing of it.

Mr. Macgregor's
Paper.

There is a heavy complacency about X's management that would to some be possibly irritating with just a hint of a great capacity for not being able to do the obvious thing at the obvious moment. On the other hand, there is a gallant little society in Y which adventures along with no complacency at all, but very spiritedly. I wish X would help Y, but I am not going to say which is X and which is Y. There are also A and B and C and D.

There are two classes of the blind which I have not mentioned, the mentally defective and the chronically infirm. These folk fill one rather with despair; they are difficult and expensive to deal with, and they are very scattered. When I speak of the mentally defective, I am not referring to the imbecile class—they, I suppose, must be left to the ordinary asylums—I am referring rather to the educable mental defective and others who could properly be cared for in a residential institution of a homely rather than of an asylum nature. So with the chronically infirm, they are people who need attention and skilled nursing and medical provision such as the ordinary homes cannot give. The provision for both these classes must come from voluntary agencies in the first instance; it is almost useless thinking of Local Authorities combining for this purpose, although I have no doubt at all they would be willing to pay the annual cost of maintenance for any accommodation provided. The initiative, I am afraid, must come from a voluntary institution which has accommodation to offer, and I can only commend that suggestion to you.

I said above that there were some definitely delinquent Local Authorities and promised to say something about them. They are Berkshire, Essex, Herefordshire, Hertfordshire, Somerset, West Sussex, Yarmouth, and Southampton. Apart from these are places like Monmouth, Merthyr, Radnor, Chester, and one or two others. There is ultimately really no question of compelling these authorities to do their duty in a matter of this kind. The Ministry can urge the matter, could withhold grants from the areas concerned, but in the end there is no real compulsion. I suggest that it is a matter in which, by deputation and by the canvassing of members, Counties' Associations and other agencies can do a valuable work. They should not rest until they have persuaded the Local Authorities to draw up and submit a scheme and put it into operation. I think that often there are one or two persons at the back of the

opposition, no one makes any apparent trouble, and economy as an abstract term is a powerful if somewhat fallacious weapon of obstruction. A policy of withdrawal on the part of the voluntary agencies from the areas in question might bring matters to a head, but such a policy is repugnant to all our feelings. There is nothing for it but to go on and, as I suggested, by deputation and canvas seek to win the recalcitrants over.

Mr Macgregor's
Paper.

I promised to say something about why the Blind Persons Act, 1920, was passed. How it was passed is an interesting story, but I will not detain you with that to-day. Let me say this, however, that although the Ben Tillett Bill and the March to London created a useful atmosphere to argue in, the Blind Persons Act would in any case have been passed. The supporters of the Tillett Bill and of the March tell us in season and out of season that the Act was passed because voluntaryism had tried and failed. I have said in season, and no doubt out of season, too, that the Blind Persons Act was passed because voluntaryism had shown the way, and the right way; it was not a failure, it was merely uneven in its incidence and insufficient in volume. I have said this over and over again, and am rather tired of saying it, but it brings me to this great question of voluntaryism as opposed to municipalisation. We are convinced that the principle of voluntaryism is right, and we are opposed to municipalisation simply for the sake of municipalisation. It is not that officials of Town Councils or Councillors themselves are unlikely or unable to interest themselves in the blind, but the make-up of a Local Authority, its procedure, its politics, are all against the ready and quick handling of the problem. Municipalisation at its best would be very close to voluntaryism in spirit and fact, at its worst it might bruise and hurt the blind incalculably, and not necessarily through want of sympathy. Voluntaryism, on the other hand, can enlist on its side all that is good in the Local Authority and can enlist as no Local Authority well can a

vast amount of personal human and sympathetic effort, and it can regulate its sympathies more easily by standards of what is right for this man and for that man than is possible for a Local Authority.

But it is a serious responsibility that voluntarism is taking on. It is no less than the care of blind persons with all that that connotes. It is the more serious because voluntarism cannot be called to account—to the same kind of account as officialism, and a bad, inefficient voluntary agency must not be allowed to imagine that it can create for itself some kind of vested interest in its local blind. Municipalisation is better than that. Slipshod methods are not to be tolerated: there are human interests at stake. It is for each agency to emulate the best amongst you, to have no rivalry one against the other, to give and receive help readily and as the natural thing when all are seeking the same purpose. Diligent forethought, kindly co-operation and a generosity of heart are all needed to secure the efficient discharge of the duties you have undertaken. And the end you seek is a great end, no less than this, that, by removing so far as in you lies the obstruction thereto which blindness imposes, you may help the blind to come into their own kingdom of citizenship with their fellows, to leave their separation behind, and become sharers in our common life. This is not easy; it is very difficult, but it must be your aim. And the task is not unhopeful and it is one of high adventure. The working of the Blind Persons Act will be a test of the faith that is in you. It must never be said that the test failed through want of will or through want of trying. I am sure that will never be said. You have a heritage of a great tradition, and I feel very sure that you will not fall short of the trust that has come down to you.
